

The Lodge of Obedience No 1753.



A Short History of the First One Hundred Years 1878 to 1978.

Foreword

This history was originally produced for the Lodge by an unknown Brother and it is thought that it was produced to mark the Lodge centenary in 1978.

The original author has since passed to the Grand Lodge above and his work has been reproduced in its current format by WBro Chris Hodgson in 2009.

The photographs were added in this reproduction and it is hoped that a new concise history will be produced to cover the 25 year period from 1978 through to 2003.

This work is dedicated to the memory of all the past members of the Lodge of Obedience between the dates of 1878 and 1978 who now meet in the Grand Lodge Above.

The Lodge of Obedience No 1753
A Short History of the First Hundred Years
1878 to 1978

The establishment of the Lodge in Okehampton.

At a preliminary meeting held at the White Hart Hotel, Okehampton, in **January 1878**, it was decided to endeavour to establish a Masonic Lodge in Okehampton and certain Brethren undertook to assist in this most desirable work.

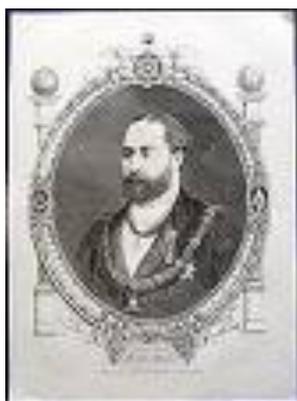
Bro William Brodie, Worshipful Master of *Semper Fidelis Lodge No 1254* was deputed to make enquiries and ascertain if the Provincial Grand Master, Bro the Rev'd John Huyshe would recommend to the Grand Lodge of England that a Warrant of Constitution be granted.

The following month Bro Brodie reported that the Provincial Grand Master had most favourably entertained the proposition of a Lodge. He conceived that the town of Okehampton could well support a Lodge as there was considerable population in the neighbourhood and a railway station about to be established in its vicinity. However, his support for a petition for a Warrant would be conditional upon Bro Brodie consenting to and being recommended as the first Worshipful Master of the Lodge.

A petition containing the following signatories was drawn up and submitted to the Provincial Grand Master who attached his certificate recommending the granting of the prayer of the petitioners.

<i>W. Brodie</i>	<i>Semper Fidelis Lodge</i>	<i>Number 1254</i>
<i>W. Pidsley</i>	<i>Semper Fidelis Lodge</i>	<i>Number 1254</i>
<i>B. Barber</i>	<i>Semper Fidelis Lodge</i>	<i>Number 1254</i>
<i>J.W Boon</i>	<i>The Lodge of Sincerity</i>	<i>Number 189</i>
<i>J.J Ball</i>	<i>Semper Fidelis Lodge</i>	<i>Number 1254</i>
<i>R.T Relf</i>	<i>The Lodge of Concord</i>	<i>Number 463</i>
<i>G.W Gould</i>	<i>Bedford Lodge</i>	<i>Number 282</i>
<i>A.J.G Waters</i>	<i>Semper Fidelis Lodge</i>	<i>Number 1254</i>
<i>A. Paddon</i>	<i>Semper Fidelis Lodge</i>	<i>Number 1254</i>

On presentation to the Grand Lodge the petition was returned as being "informal".



HRH the Grand Master

It was recopied on the printed form, with some additional information and with the name of R. Fulford of St Georges Lodge No 112 added to the list of petitioners, and with a recommendation that the prayer of the petitioners be granted. The petition was signed by the Worshipful Master and Wardens of St Johns Lodge No 39, the oldest Lodge in the Province, and was resubmitted to Grand Lodge.

A Warrant of Constitution dated **24th April 1878** was granted by the Grand Master, His Royal Highness Albert Edward, Prince of Wales.

The Consecration and first Installation.

The Lodge was duly founded, constituted and consecrated on **26th August 1878**, according to the ceremonies proper and usual on such occasions at a Provincial Grand Lodge held in the School Room, North Lane, Okehampton, by the Right Worshipful Provincial Grand Master, Bro the Rev'd John Huyshe, PGC.

Over 400 attended the ceremony and Bro Samuel Jones, PPrGSD, was deputed to install Bro William Brodie into the Chair as Worshipful Master for the ensuing year.

This was duly performed and Bro Brodie then appointed and invested his Officers as follows.

<i>Bro B. Barber</i>	<i>Immediate Past Master</i>
<i>Bro W. Pidsley</i>	<i>Senior Warden</i>
<i>Bro J.W Boon</i>	<i>Junior Warden</i>
<i>Bro Rev'd C.W.H Holley</i>	<i>Chaplain</i>
<i>Bro R.T Gelf</i>	<i>Treasurer</i>
<i>Bro G.W Gould</i>	<i>Secretary</i>
<i>Bro A.J.G Waters</i>	<i>Senior Deacon</i>
<i>Bro J.J Ball</i>	<i>Junior Deacon</i>
<i>Bro A. Paddon</i>	<i>Inner Guard</i>
<i>Bro J. Coombe</i>	<i>Tyler</i>



The White Hart Hotel

After the ceremony the Brethren formed a procession and, headed by the First Devon Militia Band, marched to the White Hart Hotel for a Banquet. On arrival at the porch the Brethren opened right and left, the Provincial Grand Master passing through the avenue thus formed and the Provincial Grand Officers and Brethren following from the rear in the usual manner.

The first 25 years; 1878 to 1903.

After the consecration and Installation, the Lodge lost no time in commencing its functions. Indeed a meeting was held the following day in the School Room, North Lane, Okehampton when the business transacted included the adoption of the By-Laws and propositions for ballots for three candidates for initiation and three joining members.

The By-Laws provided for meetings to be held at the White Hart Hotel, Okehampton on the last Monday of every month at 5pm unless otherwise fixed by the Worshipful Master, it being competent for him, with the consent of the majority of the members, to adjourn from October to March.

The initiation fee prescribed was £5 guineas, annual subscription 1 guinea and joining fee 30 shillings.



Five Guinea Piece

The last Monday in August was the day fixed for installation with an annual banquet on that same day or such other day as the Worshipful Master may appoint.

During the first few months the Lodge was extremely busy and a membership return of March 1879 shows a total of 20. This was an increase of 10 members in 9 months comprising 7 initiates and 3 joining members.

Unfortunately this build up did not continue for long and in fact after 10 years the membership had decreased to 16. From 1880 through to 1884 there are frequent references to meetings being called but not being held because of insufficient members being present. However in direct opposition to this there is a record of a meeting in 1885 where all three degrees were worked and in another meeting in 1886 four *Passings* and one *Raising* were worked.

Thus membership subsequently increased and by the end of the first quarter century number 57. Many members resided in Exeter, some in the Holsworthy and Tavistock areas and some even in Plymouth, but the majority resided in the Okehampton district.

The railway provided an important means of travel and information on the train times was frequently included on the summons as the extract from the summons for the Installation of 1887 shows:



Steam train at Okehampton Station.

Railway facilities – excursion tickets to Okehampton may be obtained as follows:

From Exmouth and Lympstone 3/-; Topsham 2/6 by all trains up to 1:30pm; return 8:33 or 9:45 pm.

From Exeter, Queen Street or St David's 2/-; by all trains up to 3:10pm; return 8:33 or 9:45 pm.

From St Cyres or Crediton 2/-; by all trains up to 2:05pm; return 8:33 or 9:45 pm.

From Holsworthy 1/6-; by 10:50am, 12 noon and 2:22 trains return by 8:37.

From Plymouth (Friary or North Road) and Devonport 2/6, Tavistock 1/6 by all trains up to 2:15. Trains for Friary return 8:18 or 10:55.

NB – a special train will leave Okehampton for all stations to Exeter at 9:45 pm connecting with last trains from Exeter to Exmouth, Dawlish, Teignmouth etc.

The Almoner was often called upon for his assistance and in 1894 a ceiling was placed on his generosity when it was decided that any grant that he should make must be limited to 1/- as a rule and only in cases as he considered really necessary should that amount be exceeded, but in no case would a grant be more than 2/-.

In 1888 mention is made of the desirability of providing an harmonium or other suitable musical instrument as a result of which a Bell American Organ, priced at £15, was purchased for £12-17-3, carriage paid from London and with a six year warranty.



A "Bell" American Organ

Several members failed to pay their subscriptions promptly and being in arrears were reported. Much time was taken by the Lodge in consideration of necessary action and great reluctance to terminate membership is evident. In 1902 however Grand Lodge directed that Brethren three years in arrears must be excluded, a direction obviously welcomed by the Treasurer.

The building of Freemasons Hall (first phase of the present building) in 1900 to 1901 was a great and important undertaking, possibly the greatest in the history of the Lodge and as such this is referred to later in this "history".



Lodge of Obedience

Despite setbacks in the early years and disappointments such as when a founder member was imprisoned for embezzlement, the Lodge concluded its first quarter century in a satisfactory position. It had developed from its formation to a healthy body with a membership of 57 and having built for its use a Freemasons' Hall of which it was justly proud.

The second quarter century; 1903 to 1928.

The Lodge flourished during the period from 1903 to its jubilee in 1928 and membership increased from 57 to 103. This is in spite of Lodges being formed at Bude and Holsworthy, areas from which members had been previously recruited, and also in spite of a letter circulated from the Provincial Grand Master in 1906 that "other than in exceptional circumstances, Lodges should decline to admit candidates from other towns in which Lodges are held".

In this 25 year period emergency Lodges were held frequently to dispose of business and in one such meeting in 1914 three initiations were carried out.

A General Purposes Committee was first appointed in 1904 to consider and report to the Lodge upon all matters affecting its welfare. The committee

comprised; the Worshipful Master, Wardens, Past Masters, Treasurer and Secretary, plus two Brethren holding no Office. Two years later it was enlarged to include all remaining Officers.

In 1917 county membership for members residing outside\ of a 50 mile radius of Okehampton was accepted unanimously, the same proposition having been rejected three years earlier on the grounds that it would cause considerable loss of funds.

The building of additional accommodation in 1910 by the provision of a dining hall and a caretakers' cottage provided another important milestone in the history of the Lodge and again this is referred to later in this "history"



Caretakers Cottage

Immediately after the works were completed and the building reopened the "Masonic Club" was formed and in 1912 a billiards table was installed. [now long since gone]

During this period WBro F. Edwards, PPrGSuptWks who had served as worshipful master in 1897 was again elected to the Office in 1919. The circumstances of this were that Bro Rev'd S.R Carden was prevented from progressing to the Office from that of Senior Warden as he was serving with H.M Forces in Salonika. Brother Carden was however installed as Worshipful Master the following year.

Previous to this in 1904 WBro C.J Futcher was declared elected to the Chair for a second time having served in that capacity in 1888. He was the Treasurer at the time of his second election and in the ballot received eleven votes. The Senior Warden at the time received five votes and the Junior Warden one vote.



Past masters board

From these two examples you may appreciate that the step from Senior Warden to Worshipful Master is not always a matter of formality.

In addition to the usual charities, both the Lodge and the Brethren contributed to the Masonic Million Memorial Fund and also to the fund for building the Okehampton Cottage Hospital as the Lodge felt that it was fitting to identify itself with efforts being made to meet a much-needed want.

It would not be realistic to pretend that all was perfect during this quarter century. This is instanced in connection with candidates when the Worshipful Master, at the request of the General Purposes Committee, addressed the Lodge on

the subject of Brethren obtaining candidates for initiation and expressed the hope that they would follow usage and custom of Freemasonry by not soliciting or pressing persons to join the craft.

Thus much was achieved during the second quarter century with the provision of additional accommodation at Freemasons' Hall and the substantial build up in membership.

The jubilee was duly celebrated on 26th August 1928 with a Masonic Service the Parish Church. At the Lodge the Following Day WBro the Rev'd S.R. Carden presented a perfect ashlar of stone from the quarries of King Solomon to mark the occasion and after the business was completed, 108 Brethren adjourned to the grounds at Oaklands for a photograph as a memento of the Jubilee and this photograph hangs in the Masonic institute, (Freemasons' Hall, Okehampton).



Perfect ashlar

The third quarter century; 1928 to 1953

Soon after the jubilee there was a desire to have a lasting memorial of the occasion and in 1929 it was decided to provide a lych gate at the entrance of the new burial ground at Okehampton Parish Church at an estimated cost of £70 to £80 . This was to be paid for by subscriptions from the Brethren plus a vote was taken to take a sum from the Lodge funds of not exceeding £20 guineas for if the subscriptions could not meet the full cost.

On completion a service of dedication was held at the Parish Church on the 28th July 1929, the preacher being the Rev'd the Venerable F.W Surtees, MA who was the Bishop of Exeter and who later became the Provincial Grand Master for the Province of Devonshire. Two framed photographs of the lych gate Were presented to the Lodge and these Now hang in the refectory.



The Lych Gate at All Saints Church.

The Lych Gate Memorial stone



Two other framed photographs of historical interest were also presented to the Lodge in 1929 on the behalf of WBro J.T Thorpe of Leicester. These photographs are of old Certificates of Initiation of a Lodge formed in Okehampton by French prisoners of war in 1810, evidence that Freemasonry was practiced in Okehampton nearly 80 years before the formation of the Lodge of Obedience. These photographs also hang in the refectory.

Whereas earliest By-Laws provided that Brethren could, by a majority vote,

decide not to meet during the winter period of October through to March, an amendment in 1930 provided that the Lodge should meet in every month except June, July and August. It is assumed that this amendment was to accommodate summer holidays instead of inclement weather. In modern times the summer recess of August is still in place but we also have a Xmas recess although this is more so the Lodge doesn't intrude into Xmas family arrangements rather than due to winter weather.

Grand Rank was conferred upon two members of the Lodge during this period. In 1930 WBro the Rev'd S.R Carden was appointed Grand Chaplain and in 1951 WBro J.J Newcombe was appointed Grand Assistant Director of Ceremonies. It is interesting to find that in the year of his preferment WBro the Rev'd S.R Carden became a founder member and the first Worshipful Master of the Lodge of St Marychurch in Torquay, and that the Lodge of Obedience, through its then Worshipful Master, presented to the new Lodge a secretaries desk to mark the occasion. [from the Devonsire year book the Lodge of St Marychurch meets under the title Lodge of St Marys No 5148]

In this period, as in the former, two Past Masters were re-elected to the Masters Chair necessitated this time by Officers not accepting the normal progression. WBro .J Avery who served as Worshipful Master in 1925 served again in 1932 and WBro J.J Newcombe served in 1933 having previously served in 1928.

There was a decrease in membership from 103 to 95 in this third quarter century and nearly all initiates in this period resided in the Okehampton area. This was because Lodges had been formed in neighbouring towns and also because of the policy of accepting candidates from without the district only in special circumstances. This appears to have proved beneficial in that membership became far less transitory, and with country membership available, members who moved away from Okehampton did not generally request clearance certificates but preferred to retain their membership with their Mother Lodge.

The fourth quarter century; 1953 to 1978.

Early in this quarter century the Lodge ceased the practice that it had previously observed when attending the funerals of deceased Brethren. This was in fact some time before an instruction was received from Grand Lodge, (in 1962), stating that no member of any Lodge should in future take any active part of the funeral service of a deceased Brother. Previous to this the practice was to call a special Lodge for the day of the funeral, to open the Lodge and then to adjourn whilst the Brethren attended the funeral. At the funeral a graveside oration was given and sprigs of acacia dropped into the grave. The Brethren then returned to the Lodge and resumed work by proposing and supporting a motion that a vote of sympathy be sent to the deceased Brothers family. The Lodge was then closed.

During this quarter century the somewhat unique "Birthday Parties", the monthly gatherings in the Freemasons' Hall for birthday celebrations, were

started. They commenced one evening when a Brother produced a cooked chicken at a gathering in the Hall which was eaten with great relish and enjoyed so much that arrangements were made for future occasions to be similarly celebrated. Soon knives and forks were produced and tables set. The birthday parties were enjoyed throughout this quarter century, and beyond and various charities also benefited from the festivities. The birthdays celebrated were the anniversaries of Initiations into the Lodge rather than actual birthdays of members.

The 80th anniversary of the formation of the Lodge was celebrated in 1958 and to commemorate the occasion a group photograph was taken in the Drill Hall and this now hangs in Freemasons' Hall. Soon afterwards consideration was given to the provision of a permanent record of the names of Past Masters of the Lodge and as a result of those deliberations the Past Masters Board was obtained and affixed to the East wall of the Lodge in 1961.



[View to the East Wall](#)

In 1965 WBro H.T Hodge was appointed to Grand Rank. He was initiated into the Lodge of Obedience in 1916 and although residing in London for many years, where he joined another Lodge, he retained his membership to his Mother Lodge and was appointed to the rank of Past Grand Standard Bearer.

Serious flooding following torrential rain occurred in 1960 and which received media publicity. It is interesting to find record that the Almoner of Semper Fidelis Lodge No 5052, meeting in Bristol, wrote expressing regret at the damage caused and offering to assist financially in any appeal for alleviation of hardship of any member of the Lodge.

Grand Lodge celebrated its 250th anniversary in 1967 and this was commemorated by the formation of a Trust Fund. The income derived from this Fund was made available to the Royal College of Surgeons to further the research into the science of surgery, particularly by the provision of fellowships. For its contribution to the fund the Lodge received the permanent jewel worn on the Worshipful Master's collar.

The original day for the Lodge Installation meeting was in August. In 1903 it was changed to October and then in 1906 it was altered to January where it remained until 1973 when it was changed to April and where it has remained ever since. [April corresponds with the date that the Warrant was granted whereas August corresponded with the date of the consecration of the Lodge]

During the past few years substantial expenditure has been incurred on major maintenance of Freemasons' Hall and the burden of this, added to the rapidly increasing running costs, has placed strain on the financial resources of the Lodge. However, following this major expenditure, it is hoped that when the

interest free loans raised to meet the cost have been repaid in the near future that the financial position will appear somewhat brighter.

Membership during the last quarter century has decreased from 95 to 82 and research shows that the main reason for this decrease is the effect of candidates of a higher age group being initiated.

Summary of the first one hundred years.

In the first one hundred years of the existence of the Lodge of Obedience the Lodge has progressed from its formation to the organisation as we know it today, [1978]. It has achieved much and the pleasure that it has provided for innumerable Freemasons is immeasurable. Members too numerous to mention have given generously of their time, money and efforts to build up and maintain the Lodge. If the earliest Members could see what has been built on the foundations laid in 1878 they would, it is hoped, be satisfied with the outcome of their early foresight and endeavours.

And so to the next century, ever remembering:

*There is so much good in the worst of us,
And so much bad in the best of us,
That it ill behoves any of us
To find fault with the rest of us.*

The building of Freemasons' Hall.

From its formation in 1878, Lodges were held in the White Hart Hotel, Okehampton, until the new Freemasons' Hall was completed in 1901. However as early as 1888 discussion on the desirability of obtaining accommodation for a Lodge room, other than in a hotel, and endeavours to achieve this are recorded.

These endeavours led to a decision in 1899 to purchase the plot of land known as Nathan's Plot for the purpose of building a Freemasons' Hall. Tenders were invited for building the Hall, six were received and the lowest, in the sum of **£415** submitted by John Sleeman, was accepted.

To finance the project Trustees were empowered to borrow from the Bankers and to mortgage the building when it was completed.

The Ceremony of laying the Corner Stone was held on the 27th August 1900 and was performed by the Acting Provincial Grand Master, WBro G.C Davie, PGD. Brethren congregated at the Church Room, formed a procession and proceeded to the Town Hall where the Mayor and Corporation awaited them and who then headed a procession to St James Church for a service.



Corner stone

At the close of the service the procession reformed and proceeded to the site of Freemasons' Hall. The ceremony there was opened by a prayer by the Provincial Grand Chaplain. A silver towel was presented to the Acting Provincial Grand Master, who after addressing the assembly placed a record of proceedings of the ceremony in position and lowered the Corner Stone upon it. The ceremony thus completed, the procession reformed in reverse order, the Mayor and Corporation returning to the Town Hall and the Brethren to the Lodge room to dispose of remaining business which included the installation of the Master Elect. A Banquet concluded the day, tickets for which were priced at 5/- each exclusive of wine.

On the 26th August 1901 Freemasons' Hall was dedicated in due and ancient form to Freemasonry, virtue, universal benevolence and friendship by WBro G.C Davie, PGD, Deputy and Acting Provincial Grand Master.

The Cost of providing and furnishing Freemasons' Hall amounted to **£747- 3-7** and is broken down as follows;-

<i>Purchase of lease of site</i>	<i>£165-0-0</i>	
<i>Legal costs and expenses</i>	<i>£ 15-6-0</i>	
	<hr/>	<i>£180-6-0</i>
 <i>Amount of building contract</i>	 <i>£415-0-0</i>	
<i>Extras on Contract</i>	<i>£ 79-2-0</i>	
	<hr/>	<i>£494-2-0</i>
 <i>Furnishings</i>		<i>£ 31-11-7</i>
<i>Mortgages and Bank charges</i>		<i>£ 15-12-0</i>
<i>Architects claim (disputed)</i>		<u><i>£ 25-12-0</i></u>
		<u><i>£ 747-3-7</i></u>
 <i>The cost was met as follows:</i>		
<i>By mortgage</i>		<i>£450-0-0</i>
<i>Contribution from Lodge funds</i>		<i>£200-0-0</i>
<i>Donations</i>		<u><i>£ 97-3-7</i></u>
		<u><i>£747-3-7</i></u>

The Architects claim was disputed as the Trustees were convinced that the Architect, a member of the Lodge, had undertaken the work in an honorary capacity. The dispute was settled arbitrarily in the sum of £15-15-0 through the intervention of the Provincial Grand Secretary following threatened litigation in the Court.

Not satisfied with the achievement of building a Freemasons' Hall instructions were given in 1906 to prepare plans to increase the accommodation by the provision of a dining hall and caretakers cottage. The plans were approved and the General Purposes Committee instructed to;- ascertain probable costs,

to look thoroughly into the question of ways and means, formulate a scheme for carrying out the work, and, to report back at an early date. From advice received the Committee recommended that a limited liability company be formed to take over the lease of the property and responsibilities of the Trustees which was adopted, thus the Okehampton Freemasons Hall Company was formed in 1909.

Tenders for these works were invited. Four were received and the lowest, that of J. Sleeman and Son in the sum of £784 accepted. To meet the costs together with that for additional work, fees etc, Freemasons' Hall Co Ltd issued £1 shares, 307 preference and 378 ordinary. They repaid the loan of £450 and raised another loan of £1000 on mortgage of the whole premises. (This loan of £1000 was repaid in 1921 from monies received from bonds taken by members of the Lodge)

The Freemasons Hall Co Ltd, having considered the cost of providing additional accommodation, offered the Lodge an agreement to take Freemasons' Hall with the cottage for a term of 14 years at a rent of £52 per annum and which was accepted. The surplus accommodation fronting Station Road was let as office accommodation to Mr G.D Cann, Solicitor at £30 per annum.

After the completion of the work the Freemasons' Hall was reopened on the 31st October 1910 and the occasion was marked by the unveiling of a Memorial Tablet by the Deputy Provincial GrandMaster, WBro John Stoker, PAGDC. The Tablet records the dates of the formation of the Lodge, the registration of Freemasons Hall Company Ltd and the reconstruction of the building.



Tablet above the refectory door.

A photograph of the Brethren in Masonic Clothing outside of Freemasons' Hall was taken and this hangs inside the building. The tablet is set into the wall, above the door to the refectory.



Copies of the original architects front and side elevations of Freemasons' Hall Okehampton.

Epilogue.

This short history has been reproduced as it was written. A further 30 years have passed since the author produced this piece and that time period will be covered in a further article.